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UTOPIA REVISITED or is it better the second time around?

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Abstract

This article essays comparisons between nineteenth- and twentieth-century school management and its direction and control by central government. Its starting point is 1816 when Jeremy Bentham presented his utopian vision of a model school, to be managed by a school master exhibiting competences detailed in his Chrestomathic Table. This has similarities to the headteachers' competences required in the late twentieth century by the government through the Teacher Training Agency. The article presents several areas for comparisons in addition to competences: definitions of effective management, governance and local community influence and the focus on quality assurance. Both periods have seen major changes in educational management and administration but will the lessons learnt from these innovations when first introduced in the nineteenth century be transferred to the late twentieth century?

Utopia revisited or is it better the second time around?

Introduction

Seeking light relief one day from the late twentieth-century practicalities of researching school leadership and how to cope with the myriad changes of the last twelve years in English education, I wandered into the past. Serendipitously, I came across Jeremy Bentham's 1816 Chrestomathia, his vision for creating a utopian school. To my surprise, it contained what are arguably the first competency lists for school managers, the Chrestomathic Instruction Table II, Principles of School Management. Steeped as I am, in post modernism, reengineering, site-based management, competencies for national vocational qualifications, theories of accountability and performance ratings, it seemed of passing interest to find these ideas originated long before the 1990s. From this beginning, I extended my search and discovered a rich vein of nineteenth-century management text books. Nineteenth-century management texts appeared to have been popular judged by numbers of such publications and their sales figures.² After 1900, such publishing appears to have gone into hibernation, not to reappear until the last quarter of the twentieth century when once again, texts appeared frequently and achieved large sales.³ Enlivening the nineteenth-century text books, I found a few novels and biographies with occasional revelations on school leaders and some secondary sources.⁴ I then tested the theories promulgated in the nineteenth-century texts against archival sources in the County Record Office in Leicester, in England and in the Tasmanian State Archives in Australia. Along my journey, I discovered that there are no histories of school management per se and hence it seemed worthwhile to attempt to fill some gaps in our knowledge.

From these chance encounters, I began a more systematic investigation, discovering resemblances between nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century school management. It is these likenesses which form the subject of this article, commencing with commentary on the value of comparisons across time. Major issues of interest in the nineteenth century were selected to see if there were similar priorities in the late twentieth century and if so, how they were viewed. Those discussed here are competences and testing, effective school leadership, governance and the local community of schools and the focus on quality assurance.

A comparative, historical outlook

Why make such comparisons? The overall similarity of the nineteenth with the late twentieth century lies in both having been times of major changes in educational provision and in the structures and formats of national and institutional leadership. Central governments gradually accepted the need for intervention in both periods,⁵ to make up for the perceived inadequacies of community and voluntary provision and direction and to bring the teaching profession and its schools' principals under control. Both periods qualify as earthquakes in educational administration and both adopted at least some similar approaches to solve the challenges of their times. In both periods, most areas of the Anglo-centric world experienced like issues and solutions. In trying to calm the late twentieth-century earthquake, some very similar techniques have been revived to those used in the last century. The extent to which the changes made this time around will be successful in settling the earthquake must be left to time and the readers to judge. This paper will provide some historical evidence to aid that judgement.

Both periods could be characterised as having seen some degree of autonomy for their schools and local 'lay' involvement in their governance, within, eventually, tight central controls over the curriculum and standards to be achieved and with tough regimes of external inspection. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in nineteenth-century England had analogous powers and roles to that of the late twentieth-century Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in England or the Education Review Office (ERO) in New Zealand. Control of schooling by local communities was gradually marginalised during the nineteenth century. Control of schooling by local politicians has been marginalised in the late twentieth century as local education authorities have been emasculated (in England for example) or removed (as in New Zealand).

Between 1900 and around 1975, site based educational leadership disappeared as the autonomous school was completely overlaid with state controls (in Australia, for example) and with local controls (in England). Despite this, by 1975 in England, central government considered that the teachers had taken control of the curriculum. Politicians regarded inspection by HMIs as a weak tool of central control over schools. It did not fulfil monitoring or evaluation purposes; its aim was to advise schools on development not to call them to account. Teachers were considered to be too powerfully autonomous and to be using teaching methods inadequate to improving pupils' achievements. This latter echoes the reasons for enhanced central control of teachers in nineteenth-century England and elsewhere. A USA writer, for example, criticised the inadequacies of teachers who were 'transient(s) snatched up for the occasion [and] paid salaries which hardly exceed the wages of a menial servant'. Teachers were seen as ignorant, without training; they became teachers to escape the workhouse. In England, the inadequacies were similar with the office of master being reportedly thrust upon the 'parish clerk, the

day labourer, the broken down mechanic or crippled nurse' ⁹ many of whom earnt no more than the wage of an agricultural labourer and had to take on additional employments to supplement their salaries. ¹⁰ While these descriptions of teachers would not be applicable in the late twentieth century, English teachers are still relatively poorly paid and work longer hours than in most other developed countries.

To correct the failings of nineteenth-century teachers, school management text books and teacher training materials, abounded with detailed, standard lesson plans and notes, precisely explaining the order and content of what was to be taught and how it was to be taught. These were to meet the requirements of the then national curriculum - the Revised Codes - introduced from 1862. The English National Curriculum of 1988 has operated similarly culminating with 1998 introduction of the National Literacy Hour. For this, every school has been issued with the same teaching materials, has received a pack of instructions with what could best be described as a 'timed script' for the Hour and teachers have had to attend central government directed training sessions. The same approach has been adopted for the delivery of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). This includes such minutiae as reminders to the instructors to welcome their aspirant principals to the training course and to tell them where to find the toilets. 11 Following this are the scripts to be used to deliver the standard overhead transparencies and set notes. Today's teachers may be highly educated and pedagogically qualified but they are still as inadequate as their nineteenth-century forbears according to government.

Thus, similarities can be found but why look for them in history? First, to be a self-respecting discipline, educational leadership needs a history. Secondly, roots can provide an understanding of how the present has emerged and what solutions to challenges have previously been tried. This knowledge should enable the futurologists of our profession and government policy makers, to reinvent what was successful in the past and avoid that which was not. Thirdly there is still justification in following a subject for its intrinsic interest especially where there is no other published work. Finally there is the drive of curiosity; there are no histories of the practice of educational leadership at institutional level so this is a contribution to providing what the Canadian poet, David Helwig, in his *Considerations*, describes as finding 'a way to encounter history in the streets of a burning city whose fire is our own...It is as much as a man can ask for, a place to start'.

Competences and testing

Jeremy Bentham's 1816 Chrestomathic Instruction Table II outlined the competences which school principals needed to master to lead to his utopia. These stressed first, the importance of good human resource leadership to be achieved by checking the quality and functioning of the teachers.. The principal had to use staff to maximum efficiency which was to be achieved through constantly watching staff at work (management-by-walk-about in twentieth-century parlance) and by encouraging their motivation. ¹⁴ Secondly, records had to be kept of pupils' achievements, enrolments, absenses and failures, basic data for late twentieth-century performance checks to ensure accountability. ¹⁵ Thirdly, standards had to be improved through classifying pupils, testing them and passing them through the grades. ¹⁶ Bentham considered that every scholar should reach perfection. Twentieth-century political leaders are less optimistic but

they loudly demand the raising of standards. Schools are expected to set targets for improving average pupil achievement. One way to accomplish this is felt to be by reclassifying pupils according to ability and gender and testing pupils at key grade stages just as Bentham suggested. Finally, Bentham envisaged the tasks of the headteacher (or the 'managing master' in Bentham's nomenclature) as general inspection and direction.

Bentham's ideas resurfaced as a national system for England's education staff in the 1990s. The movement to classify all jobs with lists of competences for aspirants to achieve began in the 1980s with business management and encompassed virtually all jobs in a National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) system by the mid 1990s. In education, competences were first listed for newly qualified teachers in the early 1990s, extending to aspirant school principals in 1997-8, to subject leaders and special needs co-ordinators over 1996-8 and finally to serving school principals in 1998-9. Table I illustrates some of the similarities between Bentham's 1816 list and the 1997 National Standards for Headteachers, published by the British government through its Teacher Training Agency (TTA).

Table I 19th and 20th century competences for school managers

COMPETENCES OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT	
General inspection and direction	To provide professional leadership for a school
	the headteacher must providedirection for the
	school
[to ensure] the quality and functions of the persons	efficient and effective use is made of staff
by whom the performance of [teaching] is to be	The headteacher is responsible for the continuous
directed	improvement in the quality of education
the preservation of discipline	a disciplined learning environment
the forthcomingness of evidence[such that] the	should have knowledge of the contribution that
universal notoriety of all past matters of fact[may	evidence from inspectioncan make to professional
be known to ensure]the future propriety of all	school development
proceedings	
[the] special object of securing perfectionof every	ensuring high quality education for all its pupils and
scholar without exception	improved standards of achievement all pupils
the union of the maximum of despatch with the	make progress toto expected or better than
maximum of uniformity.	expected levels
Whatsoever can be equally well done by the	must devolve responsibilities, delegate tasks
scholar-mastersthe managing master's time would	
be very ill employed in doing	
evidence must be provided to visiters - those who	provide informationadvice to the governing body
contribute financially to the school	10
J. Bentham, Chrestomathic Table II, 1816 ¹⁷ .	National Standards for Headteachers, 1997, TTA ¹⁸

The language differs across the centuries but the sentiments do not. The major difference is that Bentham was suggesting a utopian system. The late twentieth-century TTA which implemented it, offers courses so that aspirant principals can prove their competency in these skills in the NPQH. The TTA produces standardised training materials for these courses with little variation permitted for individual, group or regional differences. Could this be a return to the training received by Dickens's Mr M'Choakumschild in *Hard Times*? 'He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles like so many pianoforte legs'. ¹⁹

There have been suggestions that the NPQH will be made compulsory though this had not been agreed by 1998. If it is, it will replicate the nineteenth century when an examination in school leadership was compulsory for all teachers in training. The type of

questions candidates faced in the nineteenth century is shown below with the assignments set for the NPQH. The formats in which candidates would present their work differs but the topics do not.

1883 Examination Questions: Minutes of the Committee of Council for Education ²⁰.

Write a theme on "As is the master so is the school"

How will you proceed to form a good "public opinion" in your school?

Write an essay on the duties and rewards of schoolmasters.

What means will you adopt to secure (a) regular and (b) punctual attendance?

1997: NPQH Assessment Tasks for Headteachers in Preparation for Headship²¹

Prepare a 15 minute presentation for your governors, setting out your vision for the school.

Demonstrate that you can create and implement a strategic plan for improving teaching, response, progress and standards of attainment over a period of time.

Design an effective system for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing an aspect of a school's development plan.

Definitions of effective school leadership

Nineteenth-century writers of school management text books were by no means all enamoured of Bentham's competency approaches but there was generally an acceptance of the need for structure and order. There had to be 'a head master, on whose knowledge of educational principles, organising power, practical skill and governing tact, depends the efficiency of the whole'. Education was a product to be efficiently, effectively and economically created and maintained, terminology that emerged again in the post-1986 Education Acts for England and Wales. Nineteenth-century views were well encapsulated by Gladman, one of the seminal school management textbook writers, who required 'no little planning and arranging' by school masters bent on efficient administration. This was to create 'a machine...and to put it in going order'. Within this seemingly mechanical role, however, there was recognition that leadership was 'the subtle something which pervades the schoolroom and determines the character of the school', ²⁴ a view shared by HMI Matthew Arnold. Such subtlety required creativity

which Gladman considered vital to leadership. The combinations of the engineer and the innovator have re-surfaced in the late twentieth century as <u>reengineering</u>; the qualities of leadership espoused by this movement closely parallel those of the nineteenth century as Table II demonstrates.

Table II Engineering and Reengineering

Definitions of Effective School Leadership	
Engineering. ²⁶	Reengineering ²⁷
'Superintendence ought to be felt;it should be a constant, forceful, living power'	'leadership and management behaviour models effective learning strategies'
'there must be capacity for detecting weak places and parts that work badly'	'use of systems thinking to help analyse the relationship of functioning variables'
'inventiveness'	'clear statement of the purpose, vision and mission of the organisation'
'needs no little planning and arranging'	'an explicit policy defining the characteristics of the learning organisation'
the headteacher 'has to supervise and adjust [the school's] working from time to time so as to get the most out of it with the least possible frictionloosen or tighten the screws of the machine andoil it on occasion'	're-definition of core management processes (e.g. planning, implementation and evaluation) in terms of their cyclical and interrelated nature'

Both engineering (my terminology, not Gladman's) and reengineering can be seen as responses to similar circumstances. The foci of school management reflect a 'very high product orientation', ²⁸ as was the case with the factory-output models of education used in the nineteenth century. The traditionally independent, possibly individualistic eccentricity of, English headship could not, and cannot, be permitted in a system needing conformity to a state pattern in order to enable all equally to gain from the education system and to ensure that standards meet those deemed necessary by government. Hence Rule's 1894 comments could be applicable today.

The school master is no longer "the dominie", the judge-absolute, the king. His simple, direct, and unquestioned authority, that worked so wholesomely on the young mind is gone. He has become a functionary in his own old dominion; a servant to "officialism" - the grandmotherly, meddlesome old dame whose finger spoils so many pies.²⁹

The significance of any movement away from the independence of school masters was evident in HMI Matthew Arnold's comments on his school inspections in 1872.

In British and Wesleyan schools there is in general more of self government, and of the life and vigour that go with self government, than in the National Schools. They are more created by the class that uses them, and managed by that class, than are the National Schools, which are, in general, created *for* the class that is to use them by the people above it. But I find that in really good schools belonging to the Church of England success does practically establish for the teacher an independence much the same as that enjoyed by the successful teacher of a British or Wesleyan school; the teacher is not over-meddled with, and is free to put forth all the vigour and initiative he can find in himself. ³⁰

Arnold would, no doubt, have welcomed the return of self-managed schools in the 1980s in England, New Zealand, some of the Australian states and in parts of the USA. All of these exist, however, within curricular, pedagogic and standards' frameworks determined other than by their principals. Nonetheless, English school principals greatly value their independence and would not now want to return to the previous system of direction by their local education authorities (LEAs).

Governance and the local community of schools

Nineteenth-century schools were very conscious of the need to be responsive to their communities. The head's duties included 'sustaining [the school's] reputation, maintaining friendly relations with managers and parents, and, generally making the school an increasing power for good in the district'.³¹ The same responsibilities are listed by the 1997 TTA; headteachers should

develop effective links with the community, including business and industry, to extend the curriculum and enhance teaching and learning...create and maintain an effective partnership with parents to support and improve pupils' achievements and personal development. ³²

Effective links with the community were vital for the financial health of a nineteenthcentury school. Without parental support, children would not register for particular schools and so fee income and capitation would be reduced for unpopular schools. Without governors' (termed, 'managers') support, many nineteenth-century administrative tasks would be unfulfilled, community resources would not be forthcoming and advice to the head would not be available.

Late twentieth-century schools operate in the same circumstances. English schools have become self-managing financially with income dependent on parental good will in sending their children to the school since parents now have an almost free choice of school. With each child comes the state grant to cover all of a school's expenditure including staff salaries. If the child does not come, neither does the grant. School governors have been given back the extensive powers they had in the late nineteenth century; they must now divide the responsibilities of school leadership with headteachers who must once again 'manage' the governors' roles in the school. Headteachers' accountability is once again to their local communities and to parents, mediated through governors.

The late nineteenth century saw these accountabilities become irksome; the governors and parents found the duties onerous and gradually withdrew their interest. By the turn of the century both parental and governors' influence was virtually extinguished in the English and Welsh education system and in the Australian states.³³ This pattern could repeat itself at the end of the twentieth century. There are declining numbers of volunteers for governorship and suggestions that the task is too demanding for the 'layity'. England's experience is paralleled in Scotland where board members (the Scottish equivalent of school governors) have maintained their operations at the legal

minimum without seizing opportunities to extend.³⁴ These outcomes could have been recorded by the nineteenth-century HMI, Sneyd-Kinnersley. He found the clerks to the governors 'fairly moithered' by their responsibilities and the governors themselves 'ignorant' and lacking the knowledge to cope.³⁵ The enduring significance of these issues is recognised in the £3.5 million to be invested, from 1998, by one of England's major research bodies - the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). This money is to study voluntary participation in democratic institutions and one of its areas will be that of school governance.

There are also questions of governors' effectiveness to answer. Twentieth-century headteachers complain of excessive intervention by governors or of their ineffectiveness; heads feel that parent-governors are too partisan to be involved in decisions for the whole school. Generally, governors are felt to be important but there is little evidence to link effective governors with effective schools. OFSTED is to begin evaluating governors during school inspections from 1998 (following a 1997 pilot) just as did nineteenth-century HMI. The opinion of one such in 1858 could well be accepted as apposite now: 'for efficient and popular schools...the best thing which their managers [governors] can do for them is to leave them to themselves'. ³⁶ It was, after all, the character of the school principal that mattered to the effectiveness of schools, not their governance.

Who has not repeatedly seen cases of the best management [i.e. governance]...where...everything in the school worthy of the name of education has been truly miserable: whilst, on the other hand, where [governance has] been most defective...all that is valuable prospers? The fact is that everything...is mainly dependent on the master...Where intelligence, uprightness, and true holiness meet in his own character, the management [governance] is of little consequence.³⁷

Late twentieth-century evidence seems to support this. In the many 1980s and 1990s research studies into school effectiveness and improvement, there is scarcely a mention of governors at all. In the training materials produced by the government for the NPQH, the diagram summarising what makes schools effective, does not include the governors although governance is a compulsory element in the NPQH course.

Focus on quality assurance

Quality assurance has been revived as a major concern of the late twentieth century as it was in the late nineteenth century. Prior to the 1990s, an English school could expect to be inspected once every two hundred years. From the early 1990s, it became once every four years; schools to be inspected received about one term's notice of their inclusion in the OFSTED calendar. This is not quite as frequent as the annual, and unannounced, inspections of the nineteenth century but the foci of the visits are the same: results, management, state of the buildings, relations with governors and parents and teaching quality *inter alia*. There is also the same emphasis on publication of the outcomes and forms of league tables for comparisons of schools, to ensure that value for money is being achieved and that pupils are doing as well as those in comparable schools. Nineteenth-century 'outputs had to be measured and, in some sense, quantified and standardised'. Lancaster, for example, reported in 1803 to his patrons that achievements had more than doubled since individual scholars at his school could spell 20,000 words and worked 2,000 sums per annum.³⁸

Failing schools in the nineteenth century had fifty per cent of their grant with-held and six months to remedy their defects³⁹. For each subject failed by a child, 2/8d (13p) was deducted from the school's grant. After the six months period of grace, there would be an unannounced inspectors' visit to check that the school had corrected its faults.

Meanwhile, parents withdrew their children from such schools with consequent loss of fee income. Failing schools in the twentieth century are categorised as being in 'special measures' while they correct their faults. If that is not achieved then they may be publicly 'named and shamed' for their inadequacies and/or the schools are closed. Meanwhile, parents will be withdrawing their children from such schools with consequent loss to the schools of state grant per child.

Inspectors' reports seem set in much the same language over the years:

1882 - This school is 'characterised by cheerful yet exact discipline...without noise demonstration of authority...its organisation is such as to distribute teacher's power judiciously...the teaching is animated and interesting...such a school seeks by other means to be of service to the children who attend it [it had a lending library and a savings bank].⁴⁰

1994 - The school provides learning of high quality...Teachers provide a variety of approaches to learning which stimulate their pupils...The school is well led and efficiently managed and administered...resources for teaching are well deployed...The school does much to promote its pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. 41

Teachers reactions to inspection also seem to have changed little. In the 1860s:

Teachers...encouraged exam dodges...and the inspection became a game of mechanical contrivance in which the teachers will and must learn how to beat [the inspectors]...every educator knows...that his best results are those that cannot be measured at all...[inspection failed} to stimulate the intellectual life of the school. 42

By the 1890s, the situation did not appear to have improved. In Thomas Hardy's, *Jude the Obscure*, there is a record of a surprise visit when the pupil teacher, Sue, was at work:

The effect of her timidity was such that she uttered a cry of fright.[The master] ...was at her side just in time to prevent her falling from faintness. She soon recovered herself, and laughed; but when the inspector had gone, there was a reaction. (Brandy had to be administered to save the day). 43

The reason for the fear was, no doubt, because of the inquisitorial power of the inspectorate on whose assessment depended the school's allocation from the Treasure grant, just as has become the case in the late twentieth century. This system was criticised by nineteenth-century HMIs⁴⁴ and its re-introduction does seem to have also re-introduced some to the ways in which nineteenth-century school teachers attempted to

circumvent the best intentions of HMI. 1990s' teachers have been accused of 'cheating' in preparation for OFSTED inspections, e.g. disruptive pupils are discouraged from attendance during the inspection week; the considerable time spent on preparing paperwork for OFSTED inspections has been attacked for distracting teachers from teaching; inspections are felt to be non-developmental experiences. At the same time, OFSTED is considered to have impacted favourably on improving school results; headteachers and governors admit that the reports often reinforce what they themselves have criticised in their own schools and some poor schools and staff have been removed.⁴⁵

In addition to the 'sticks' of HMI inspection, nineteenth-century teachers had the 'carrot' of merit pay. If a school were deemed by the inspectors to be successful then a merit grant was achieved. Attempts were made to reintroduce this idea during the 1980s with the money to be allocated to individual teachers. The profession undermined the first attempts to do this but government began testing professional and public reaction to the idea in 1998⁴⁶. A grade of Advanced Skills Teacher was introduced from September 1998 with salaries enhancement of about £10,000 above the top of the teachers' pay scale. This re-introduction of 'payment-by-results' can also be seen in the creation of the Education Action Zones. These are public/private partnerships to be established to run schools in disadvantaged areas and these will be able to suspend national pay scales and to devise their own.

The extent to which these eclectic comparisons are reassuring or disturbing are likely to depend upon the readers' perceptions of the state of modern schooling and on whether or comparisons across such vast tracts of time are seen as facile. My own views are that comparisons may be odious but they are fun. This can best be summarised in an adapted version of Arthur Sullivan's mid-nineteenth-century drawing room ballad, *The Lost Chord*, which here becomes:

The Lost Leader?

Seated one day in the school room. I was weary and ill at ease, And I glanced at my leadership textbook To seek new ways to please; I found Gladman's engineering, To structure my classroom ways, One utopia of Bentham's vision, To lead them all my days, to lead them all the days. It may be that reengineering, Will speak in the vision again; We'll maintain quality assurance, So great schools will remain; Let us hope that schooling's bright angel, Won't let us make mistakes again, So e'en in this earthly Heaven, There'll be no leadership strain.

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² Quite a number ran to several editions, for example, C.G. Collins (3rd Ed) *Notes on School Management* (London, Moffat and Page, 1887); T.A. Cox and R.F. Macdonald (2nd Ed.) *The Suggestive Handbook of Practical School Method* (London, Blackie and Son, 1897); J. Currie (New ed) *The Principles and Practice of Common-School Education* (London, W. Stewart and Co., undated); P. W. Joyce, *A Handbook of School Management* (Dublin, McGlashan & Gill, 1864). This was a sellout success in one year with 2,000 copies necessitating a second edition.

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³ See, for example, the *School Leadership and Management Series* from Pitmans (Financial Times Publishing), edited by Brent Davies and John West-Burnham. These routinely have sales around 2,000 for each title.

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- ¹⁴ Principle I 'relative to the *Official Establishment*: i.e. to the *quality* and *functions of the Persons* by whom the performance of the [instruction] is to be directed.
- Principle III having for their special object, the securing of the *forthcomingness of Evidence* viz. in the most correct, complete, durable and easily accessible shape: and thereby the most constant and universal *notoriety* of all *past* matters of *fact*.
- ¹⁶ Principles IV and V.
- ¹⁷ J. Bentham (1816) Chrestomathic Table II and p.26.
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- ²³ F. J. Gladman (1885), Part II, 9. Gladman was Principal of both the Borough Road Training College in London and of the Melbourne Central Training Institute for Teachers. His book, written just before he died in Australia, had wide provenance in both England and in Australasia.
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